10. A method for identifying [a] characteristics of [a] data files, comprising:

receiving [generating a] digital content identifiers for the data files [and forwarding the identifier to a processing system] from a plurality of source systems all coupled to a network;

determining, on a processing system coupled to the network, whether the forwarded identifier matches a characteristic of other identifiers; and

[processing] outputting, to at least one of the plurality of source systems responsive to a request from said source system, an indication of the chrematistic of the [email] data file based on said step of determining.

18. A method of filtering an email message, comprising:

receiving [processing the message to provide] a digital content identifier unique to the message content from at least two of a plurality of devices;

comparing the digital identifier to a characteristic database of digital identifiers received from said plurality of devices to determine whether the message has [said] a characteristic; and

responding to a query from at least one of said plurality of devices [processing] of the existence or absence of said characteristic of the message based on said [step of] comparing.

19. The method of claim 17 wherein said step of [processing] comparing occurs on at least one network coupled processing system [first system, and said step of comparing occurs on a second system].

20. The method of claim 18 wherein said step of [processing] receiving includes receiving identifiers [occurs on a] from said plurality of first systems.

21. The method of claim 18 wherein said [at least one first] plurality of systems [and second system] are coupled by the Internet.

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22.   The method of claim [17] 18 wherein said step of comparing comprises determining the frequency of a particular ID occurring in a time period, classifying said ID as having a characteristic, and comparing digital identifiers to said classified IDs.

23.   A file content classification system, comprising:
        a first system having a file to be classified;
        a[n] file ID generator on the [fist] first system outputting at least one file ID for the file based on a generated checksum of at least one selected portion of said file;
        a database on a second system coupled to the ID generator to receive IDs generated by the ID generator; and
        a comparison routine on the second system classifying the ID relative to the database as meeting or not meeting a characteristic.

25.   The system of claim 23 wherein the plurality of first systems is coupled to the second system via [the Internet] a combination of public and private networks.

27.   A file content classification system for a first and second computer coupled by a network, comprising:
        a client agent file content identifier generator on the first computer, the file content identifier comprising a checksum of at least two non-contiguous sections of data in a file; and
        a server comparison agent and data-structure on the second computer receiving identifiers from the client agent and providing replies to the client agent;
        wherein the client agent processes the file based on replies from the server comparison agent.

28.   A method for providing a service on the Internet, comprising:
        collecting data from a plurality of systems having a client agent generating digital content identifiers for each of a plurality of files on the Internet to a server having a database;

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characterizing the [data] <u>files based on said digital content identifiers</u> received relative to [information] <u>other digital content identifiers</u> collected in the database; and

transmitting a content identifier to the client agent <u>indicating the presence or absence of a characteristic in the file.</u>

30.   The method of claim 27 wherein said [data] file <u>content</u> is an e-mail.

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